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## ROME AND THE INQUISITIONS.

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Two hundred and forty-two years ago, in one of Rome's majestic palaces, before an illustrious assemblage of Roman dignitaries, arrayed in all the gorgeous magnificence of Roman ecclesiasticism, there stood an aged man of venerable mien, who looked the very man he was—the Nestor of mathematical science.

The great churchmen who surrounded composed the dreaded court of the Roman Inquisition, and they ere long adjudged him guilty of heresy in proclaiming the scientific doctrine that the earth revolves around the sun.

That man was Galileo Galilei, and in his condemnation by so mighty a power, the world abroad believed that science had received her martyrdom.

Galileo's conviction and censure embodied a condemnation, by the congregation of the Inquisition and the Index, of his theories respecting the movement of the earth and its relation to the universe as false and unscriptural—a decision rendered by a court of ecclesiastics not wholly responsible to the church for its judgment, as the latter has never spoken on faith or morals save through the person of her supreme pontiff pronouncing an *ex cathedra* judgment.

The inquisitorial process against Galileo in 1633, being wholly under the control of the "Holy Office," bears no expression or pledge of papal authority, while the bishops scattered throughout the world had no voice in the affair.

But the court of Inquisition had blundered—its blunder was indeed a mighty one, its censure hasty and unwarranted, and it must forever bear the stigma of creating by its imprudent verdict the most baneful impressions on the scientific and religious worlds of that day and of ours.

The office of the Roman Congregation had been to detect and subsequently to judge the heretical suspect; and if necessary to administer punishment in the form of imprisonment in cases of

obstinacy. Beyond this it could not act. It had naught to do with the defining and promulgation of articles of faith or morals. It was an eminently local congregation of cardinals, who hesitated to search far beyond the confines of Italy for heretical sentiments; and, furthermore, its decisions were in no case final in the eyes of the church.

The judgment of the court was virtually the honest opinion of the ecclesiastics composing it. Copernicanism, as far back as 1616, had been branded as false and heretical by the congregations of the Index and Inquisition, but neither the decree of 1616 nor that of 1633 bears even the semblance of papal approbation—a self-evident proof that there was a yet higher power, the church in the person of her pontiff, which the Index knew constituted the great court of appeals, and which alone might pronounce an infallible verdict.

The consensus of eminent churchmen affords us, perhaps, the safest way to discover the sentiments prevailing subsequent to the trial of Galileo.

In 1651 the Jesuit Riccioli advises the propriety of respecting the censure “until the judges, either by themselves recognizing, or being shown by others, the truth of the demonstration, withdraw it.” (See “*Almagest*. Nov.,” tom. ii. p. 489.)

Ten years later the Grand Penitentiary Fabri reminded his contemporaries that the Copernicans had not yet published a satisfactory demonstration, and speaks his opinion thus: “But if haply one should be some time excogitated by you (which I should hardly fancy), the church will in nowise hesitate to declare that those passages (of Scripture) are to be understood in a figured and improper sense.” (See a letter from Anzout to Abbé Charles, 1664, “*Memoirs de l’Académie des Sciences*,” Paris.)

Father Grassi, S.J., and the great Cistercian Caramuel (“*Theol. Moral. Fundun.*”), maintained in their writings a similar position without molestation; and Father Faune, S.J., himself opposed to Copernicanism, and a bosom friend of Pope Pius VI., declares with some enthusiasm that it was never condemned by papal bull or ecumenical council. (See “*Annot. to Notæ in Enchiræa*,” St. August., Romæ, 1775.)

The *major et sanior pars* of the community and church never sought to maintain the decrees of the Roman Congregations to be irreformable. Indeed, the extremest of the advocates of the

powers of the Index did not venture to assert that its judgments were beyond appeal.

The great Bellarmino, himself a veritable "hammer of heretics," was not an exception to the general run.

Copernicus had given his immortal work "*De Revolutionibus Orbium*," to the world in 1543, fully twelve years subsequent to its actual completion, by reason of his fear of its immediate effects on the church and society. To conciliate the former, he finally dedicated it to the reigning pontiff, Paul III.

No court of Inquisition was convened for his trial, nor were his works anathematized. The Copernican theory was so mighty an innovation on the universal medieval belief that the earth controlled all the planets and the sun, as the central power of the universe, and that Scripture itself sustained it at least by imputation, that the whole world was startled. All the learned men of the age read and discussed the new theories, and Pope Paul felt highly honored in the dedication to him of so great a work.

It was not until 1616, when the conflict of Copernicanism with the Ptolemaic and Aristotelian theories was at its uttermost height, that some decision was demanded by the enemies of the new school of science.

The same forces were gathered at this time as were marshaled at the condemnation of Galileo—the fanatical supporters of the laws of antiquity had come to conquer, and the decree of the Index proclaimed the falsity of Copernicanism. But the church and her pontiff were silent! Rome had not spoken!

If the church herself had condemned the theories of Copernicus in the seventeenth century, would she not do likewise in the nineteenth? No single instance can be given in history in which the church either through pontiff or council has ever revoked an article of faith or morals pronounced by any preceding pope or council.

In all matters referring to faith and morals the church has held, and still holds, herself to be immutable. The silence of the pope in 1633, following Galileo's censure, is a self-evident proof that the spirit of the church coincided with the public declaration in our day by a celebrated and learned churchman, that "faith and morals were not concerned in the question of the revolution of the earth around the sun," that "time was necessary to ascertain the fact that the earth does move," and that Scripture does not teach the contrary.

The opinion of the Roman prelates was presumably honest, even if false; and the world looked on complacently for future developments, regarding the "Index Expurgatorius" as the best possible place for such untenable hypotheses, however grand in conception.

It was in 1632 that Galileo gave to the public his "Un dialogo intomo i due Massimi Sistemi del Mondo." It was the first production of its kind, and since the days of Copernicus the theories and notions of antiquity in their bearing on science had not endured so scathing a criticism—they were virtually expunged from the domain of truth. "El dialogo" was the philosopher's masterly assertion and lucid explanation of theories which he could positively prove *true* from the long record of scientific experiments which have bestowed on him the immortal dignity of "Father of experimental science."

As in 1616 so in 1633, the church and pontiff were silent. May not that silence imply that the arraignment of Galileo on the ground of heresy was as local in interest as was the court in imposition?

The Church Universal, in the persons of her bishops and pope, though seemingly indifferent as to the verdict of the Inquisition, were doubtless thoroughly interested in the final results of scientific research, but chose to do no more than clothe the new theories in the habit of possibility or of probability.

It was sufficient for the end that time should play her part in proving or disproving what an irresponsible court had anathematized.

History has brought down to us, as an apology for the blunder, the details of a personal resentment on the part of Pope Urban toward his former friend Galileo, created by a real or imaginary satirization of the former, under the title "Simplicio" in "Un dialogo, etc.," in which Galileo views the pontiff in the light of a man careless of scientific truth, and a greater lover of the laws of the ancients, regardless of recent scientific research.

If Urban personally brought to bear the weight of the "Holy Office" on his real or imaginary foe, the world may never know it as a positive fact, and Urban may yet be spared the imputed character of an unchristian pope with an otherwise unblemished pontificate.

If false, this personal difficulty might better be silenced; but

if true, it fully answers the accusation that the Roman Church of the seventeenth century was the enemy of science, though at the same time it bestows dishonor on the head of the church. The Church Universal, then, may not be made to suffer through the acts of her irresponsible prelates. She has formally declared her principles and defined her position toward science in the syllabus of the last Vatican Council: "Let him be anathema . . . who shall say that it may at any time come to pass in the progress of science, that the doctrines set forth by the church must be taken in another sense than that in which the church has ever received and yet receives them."

This she regards as an infallible and final judgment, as it was formulated by a general council and promulgated by the sovereign pontiff, Pius IX., *ex cathedrâ*. In it immutability in faith is declared. It moreover implies the necessity of submitting the theories of science to be judged by revealed religion, rather than to join without due investigation many of the wild sallies of scientific hypothesis.

The *ex cathedrâ* voice of the church is irreformable. The voice of the congregation of the Inquisition may be as easily false as true.

The average reader never ceases to connect the code and acts of the Roman with those of the Spanish Inquisition. It is, indeed, a very easy task to discover the collateral tie, but a very difficult one to conscientiously compare their histories in the light of one and the same institution. Founded in 1248 under Innocent IV., its primary object was the guarding of Christian faith and morals against the adverse influences of the various sects that arose from time to time during the later middle ages, and whose votaries had finally become so bold and treacherous that heresy was regarded in those days as the very worst of crimes.

Administered at first by the zealous Dominicans, the "Holy Office" was the means of instituting the most salutary reforms. It was not until it became identified with the state that its nature and purpose were corrupted into a tool of the unscrupulous monarch, whereby its religious characteristics were obliterated in Western Europe, acquiring in later days the opprobrious name of "Spanish Inquisition." That section of the Inquisition operating in Italy, being under the immediate and paternal influence of

the popes, retained its ancient characteristics, and remains to this day a purely religious tribunal.

The church's creed evidently does not embody oppression among its articles, though such was the predominant spirit among the Spanish Inquisitors. Indeed, from their clutches not even an eminent ecclesiastic could free himself when once rendering himself a suspect; and it was only after a mighty struggle that Sixtus IV. succeeded, by pure virtue of his office, in debarring the establishment of its courts in those cities of Italy then belonging to Spain.

Yielding to the urgent appeals of Isabella, Sixtus, in 1480, consented to its establishment as a means, more political than religious, of preserving the integrity of the monarchy, then disturbed by the intrigues of the Moors and Jews and countless criminals.

The pontiffs were ever ready to extend the hand of charity and offer asylum to the unhappy refugees of every creed and race who sought protection from the fury of the inquisitors; and the seeming anomaly of a pope excommunicating an inquisitor for severity of judgment and heartlessness in punishment, was but the repetition of the paternal acts of a long line of pontiff kings.

The Inquisition became virtually a handy instrument of the Spanish crown, and the popes continued in succession to wage a merciless warfare against its practices. Sixtus wrote at least one letter to the sovereigns of Spain, and admonished them that "mercy toward the guilty was more pleasing to God than the severity which they were using."

The atrocities of the Spanish institution were thoroughly Spanish, and the Roman Church may hold herself irresponsible for them. She more than once has seen her own bishops summoned before that arbitrary tribunal with no hope of pardon or freedom, even through the good offices of the Holy See.

The Spanish Court of Inquisition was a mixed tribunal, composed equally of lay and clerical members, and its authority ultimately commenced and ended with the crown; and to give it a yet more civil character, it followed the example of the common law, and followed up conviction and punishment by an arbitrary confiscation of personal property.

The king filled his treasury with these spoils.

It was to the advantage of the royal family to covertly encourage its excesses.

On the other hand, the penal code of the Inquisition was merciful and just when compared with the code of the kingdom as administered in the time of Charles V.

The latter was rife in red-hot pincers, mutilation, and terrible methods of capital punishment, while the Inquisition was free from all such barbarities. (Compare Hefeli's "*Life of Ximenes*.")

Even Florenti, the fallen priest-historian and avowed enemy of the inquisitors, declares in detail that a marked difference was evident between the inquisitorial and government prisons; and this nominally religious court enjoyed ere long the reputation of being the justest tribunal in Christendom, a title which, to us, may seem wholly inapplicable to a court that occasioned by its own voluntary acts so much misery and suffering.

Whatever accusations may be hurled against the Roman Congregations in the exercise of their offices, it is a solemn historical fact that, during the long and varied careers of those powerful tribunals, no authenticated case of capital punishment has ever occurred in the dominions of the pope, where they exercised their chief authority.

The Index and the Inquisition still survive in Rome, and though not as far-reaching in their influence and powers, yet are equally important in the government of the Church Universal. The inquisitorial processes against heresy and heretical publications still continue at Rome, the capital of the Christian world, and the judgments of the Index are still presumably true, though by no means beyond appeal. The pressure of public opinion in church and society constitutes a powerful safeguard against any possibility of an arbitrary act, while at the same time it confers a blessing on the church by thwarting every inclination toward blunder.

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